

The Use of Translators for Limited English Proficient Students for the Administration of Maine's State Assessments

Maine is a state with a low incidence of Limited English Proficient students. For that reason, for a number of years one of the accommodations allowed on state assessments including the MEA, and beginning in 2006, the SAT, is E6:

“Tests and/or student responses were translated word for word into native language for an LEP student by local personnel.
(NOTE: Translation of the following is NOT allowed: the ELA – reading sessions, and student responses to the ELA – writing and ELA – reading sessions. Student responses to the mathematics and science & technology sessions may be translated into English. All student responses sent for scoring must be in English.)”

A check with the districts representing 67 % of 4th grade students, 63 % of middle school students, and 100% of the high school students who used the accommodation indicates that:

1. All but a very few of the translators are people who work with the students every day as part of the professional or paraprofessional staff.
2. Those translators who are not part of the staffs are screened for literacy in both English and the native language into which they will be translating.
3. In one district with a large Somali population, the translator is the District's liaison with the local Somali community. He is a member of the staff.
4. The district with the greatest population of Limited English Proficient students in the State holds a training workshop for its translators annually.

One of that district's administrator said, “It is important to expose translators to the test so that they have a context to operate from. They have to understand reliability. We have them do released items to get a sense of what the students will be asked.”